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L HISTORY OF LOCAL
GOVERNMENT IN THE
HAMILTON-WENTWORTH
REGION 1788-1974

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THE HISTORY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
IN THE HAMILTON-WENTWORTH REGION
1788 - 1974

In 1860, the New York Times praised Hamilton as "a beautiful town. It lies at the head of Burlington Bay...in a charming basin, made by the abrupt falling off of the tableland to the vast upper country beyond...This valley is warm and sheltered, and its soil...is of wondrous fertility and fruitfulness. The town is scarcely twenty years old...and is the chief entrepo and commercial mart of the extensive upper country to the west. The position of the town cannot be excelled - indeed, rarely equalled. Its upper quarter overlooks the lake and bay; the broad valley of Dundas, some miles above; the neighbouring heights and beautiful picturesque lands stretching out for miles opposite. Just behind the town, and hundreds of feet above it, is the mountain, which looks down upon the town itself, even away beyond Toronto and into the mighty misty blue of its far eastern boundary."

This description of Hamilton at mid-century, coincided with the town's own view of itself. The official civic motto, "I Advance", was another illustration of the aggressive, entrepreneurial drive of the city fathers who in the next generation would remake Hamilton into the "Birmingham of Canada".

Hamilton had come a long way in only a few short years. Prior to the American Revolution of 1776, the land west of the Niagara River was a virgin wilderness, and home only to the Mississauga Indians. In the next two decades the best land near the head of Lake Ontario and along the numerous navigable streams in the region were surveyed and settled by little groups of

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United Empire Loyalists who had come to British soil in search of free land, and freedom from religious, racial or political persecution. Although the actual townsite of Hamilton was not laid out until 1813, the settlement was designated as the administrative centre of the entire District of Gore three years later. Initially the village made little commercial headway due largely to the physical barrier imposed by the Niagara Escarpment to the south and the swamp in the vicinity of the bay. As a result, the region's trade was conducted by the merchants in the older settlement of Dundas (1793) which was located in a valley which ran through the escarpment, and on the newly built government road which provided communication with Toronto and London. Its primary advantage over Hamilton, however, was Spencer Creek which provided transportation and power for the village's mills.

In 1832, the Burlington Canal connected Hamilton Harbour with Lake Ontario and inaugurated a period of steady commercial growth in the district town of Hamilton. The local merchants were quick to take advantage of the opportunity and Hamilton quickly developed into a major port on Lake Ontario, and the primary wholesale-distribution centre for the surrounding agricultural communities. When Dundas was connected to Hamilton Harbour five years later by the Desjardins Canal, Dundas slowly fell into disuse as larger ships were diverted into the excellent harbour at Hamilton with its connections between Toronto and Niagara. From less than one thousand inhabitants in 1832, Hamilton's population rose to over three thousand in 1837. The town was now the third largest settlement in Upper Canada.

During the late 1840's the deepening of the Welland Canal and the completion of the St. Lawrence canal system so increased the community's commercial prospects that when the chances of rail connections throughout Upper Canada became a real possibility in the next decade, the citizens were ready to make the necessary sacrifices. The Great Western Railway, it was hoped, would divert the trade of southwestern Ontario through Hamilton. The town had already become the principal wholesale centre for much of the region and was second only to Toronto in terms of both economic importance and population. The railway, the citizens felt, would push Hamilton past Toronto!

At a public meeting in 1849 the assembled citizens voted overwhelmingly to urge the city council to purchase fifty thousand pounds worth of stock in the Great Western. As one prominent citizen declared: "Every person acquainted with the position of Hamilton, must be aware, that without this road it would remain an inland town, with little commerce and manufactures; but if the railroad were once constructed, Hamilton would be the great mart for the business of the West, as well as for a large portion of the United States." This sentiment was apparently shared by most of his fellow citizens.

The Great Western stretched from Windsor through London and Hamilton to Niagara, where it connected with routes serving upstate New York. For the city's businessmen, Hamilton's future prosperity depended on the continued expansion of trade. The railroad

facilitated this by allowing the city to assert its hegemony over the rich agricultural hinterland of southwestern Ontario. The construction of the Great Western thus played a primary role in the consolidation of Hamilton as a regional metropolis and as a manufacturing centre.

Initially, however, the city faced mounting deficits as a result of its policy of granting generous cash bonuses to railway companies and industrial firms which promised to settle in the community. In 1862 Hamilton declared bankruptcy and the furniture of the city hall and the city hospital was put up for sale. The city's plight was intensified when the Great Western was connected with Toronto. Thereafter, Hamilton declined as a wholesale centre relative to Toronto and became increasingly subordinate to her. Other movements, however, were already underway that would turn Hamilton into the steel capital of Canada. The completion of a deepened Welland Canal in 1887 improved the city's access to the American iron and steel plants on Lake Erie, while the introduction of a protective tariff on iron and steel products and the institution of government bonuses to companies producing pig iron from domestic ore stimulated the development of a Canadian iron and steel industry. Hamilton was the major beneficiary.


Encouraged by favourable tax concessions, free land and a cash bonus from the city, Canada's first pig iron blast furnace was opened in Hamilton in 1895. Hamilton also benefitted from its location which included an excellent harbour accessible to Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, good railway facilities, proximity

to the Pennsylvanian coalfields, a local supply of limestone and its nearness to southern Ontario markets. During this period, International Harvester Co. and Westinghouse were also lured to the lakehead.

After 1900 the Hamilton iron and steel industry expanded rapidly in response to the tremendous demand generated by the railway boom in Western Canada, and the need for such manufactured products as farm machinery in the emerging prairie communities. In 1910 the five major steel companies in Ontario and Quebec amalgamated into the Steel Company of Canada (Stelco) and established Hamilton as the unrivalled steel centre of Canada. In the process, the city's population increased from 53,000 in 1901 to 100,000 in 1916.

Since the turn of the century Hamilton has become increasingly specialized - Dominion Foundries and Steel Limited (Dofasco) began producing steel in 1912 - and, with the exception of Kitchener, a higher proportion of its labour force is engaged in manufacturing than is the case in any other metropolitan area in Canada.

Until recently this city of heavy industry was characterized as being permanently shrouded in smoke and pollution. Now its air and water are being cleaned up, the old run-down buildings have been replaced by attractive modern structures, and the Niagara Escarpment is being developed for recreational pursuits. Hamiltonian can thus still take pride in their motto: "I Advance".



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were changed to Eastern, Midland, Home and Western in 1792). At the turn of the century the number of districts had been expanded to eight and the municipalities now included in the present day Region of Hamilton-Wentworth were divided between the districts of Home and Niagara.

The district, for all practical purposes, was the local government unit. It is true that the land was surveyed into townships and divided into counties, but the township had almost no powers, and the county was primarily a parliamentary constituency. The management of local affairs in Home and Niagara was committed to the District Court of Quarter Sessions which was composed of magistrates appointed by the Governor. The magistrates (or Justices of the Peace) were the real rulers of the community. Their powers were all pervasive. They had complete charge of finances, road building, the construction of the local jail and court house, the regulation of ferries, and the sale of liquor licences. The magistrates appointed such officials as the treasurer, the road surveyors, and the constable. They were given the authority to deal with the special needs of Ancaster and Dundas, and they heard a variety of cases on such diverse questions as larceny, forgery, keeping a disorderly house, and assault - which was the most common problem and reflected the frontier aspects of the growing community.

Initially the J.P.'s powers had been more limited, but as the population increased and problems demanding local decisions multiplied, the Quarter Sessions were given additional responsibilities. The Loyalists, however, remained dissatisfied and when

Upper Canada was established as a separate province in 1791, the first bill introduced into Parliament was intended to provide representative municipal institutions similar to those in the New England states. John Graves Simcoe, the Lieutenant Governor, opposed the bill because it savoured of American democracy, and a compromise act was passed which permitted a small number of elected town officers who would be responsible to the magistrates and not to the ratepayers who elected them. A town meeting could be held only on a warrant signed by two magistrates and it had no legislative function beyond controlling the height of fences in the township. As a result, the township remained only a minor part of the machinery of local government until 1849.

The real powers of government lay with the magistrates who were appointed "during pleasure" from among the more respectable elements of society around the head of the lake - retired military officers, large landowners, and prominent lawyers and merchants. As a group these magistrates possessed all the real power in the community. They were considered the trustworthy people of the district, and most appointments were made on the basis of family connections. Because many magistrates were either too old or lived too far distant from the district town at Niagara their attendance was irregular and the Quarter Sessions were actually run by an even smaller group of stalwarts. Inasmuch as the J.P.'s powers were delegated by the provincial parliament, their authority was unlimited, yet at the same time it must be concluded that local self-government barely existed at all prior to 1841.

The efficiency of local government naturally depended upon the availability and quality of the magistrates. Unfortunately both were sadly lacking. There never seemed to be enough active and capable magistrates to perform the functions assigned to them. In Ancaster, for example, there was only one magistrate and he was not able to even stop an outbreak of petty larceny. For want of justices in the Niagara District, town meetings were not held, statute labour on the roads went unperformed or unsupervised, and lawbreakers went unpunished.

The situation was not made any better by the rapid population increase in Wentworth County in the 1830's, nor by the immense size of the district. The provincial government realized that the district was too large, but there was a limit to the number of local institutions which the relatively poor and dispersed population could afford. As the region filled up, the District of Niagara was created in 1798 out of the townships of Ancaster, Barton, Binbrook, Glanford and Saltfleet (Beverly and Flamborough remained in the old Home District). Unfortunately the prospect of continued subdivision hindered the development of a sense of community feeling, and made it difficult to plan with any degree of confidence. In addition, the continual creation of new districts aroused local animosities.

By 1810 the population scattered around the head of the lake was becoming progressively more dissatisfied with the state of the local government. The rapid increase and dispersal of settlement into the interior, combined with the absence of good roads, aggravated the problem of travelling to the district

towns of Niagara (Newark) and Toronto (York). The greater part of Beverly Township and the two Flamboroughs were separated from Toronto by thirty miles of Indian territory, while Barton, Saltfleet and Ancaster were even farther from Niagara. It was thus a real hardship to travel to the district town to visit the land registry office, to attend court or to conduct official business. Once there, the weary traveller soon realized that the resident magistrates had only a scanty knowledge of local conditions outside of the district town. As a result, the citizens petitioned for the creation of a new district at the head of the lake.

Unfortunately, no one could agree on where the district town should be located. Each village hoped that it would be chosen and therefore become the site of the court house, the jail and the district's administrative offices. *The rivalry seemed to be mainly between Brant Bock (Burlington), and the two flourishing mill villages of Ancaster and Cootes Paradise (Dundas). Other petitions extolling their community's virtues came from Crook's Hollow and Durand's farm (the present site of Hamilton). Before the provincial government could decide, the War of 1812 intervened. Following the war, the District of Gore was created in 1816 out of present day Wentworth, Halton and part of Brant. To everyone's surprise Durand's farm was chosen as the district town, and was named after the new owner of the farm - George Hamilton.

Almost no one was happy with the government's decision. Ancaster and Dundas both petitioned to have the district town moved to their community. Dundasians felt particularly affronted that the small insignificant village of Hamilton had been selected over its own flourishing site. The dissatisfaction reached its climax ten years later when Dundas once again petitioned the government to relocate the county jail and court house to a more central site, and then attempted to take control of the Court of Quarter Sessions in order to have the district town moved to Dundas. Their actions were declared illegal and Hamilton was there to stay. The incident does, however, reveal the extent of the rivalry between Dundas and Hamilton for control of the agricultural hinterland of Wentworth.

The Early Development of Urban Government

Municipal institutions in Upper Canada developed slowly and in piecemeal fashion. The first provision for the special needs of urban areas came in 1792 when the Quarter Sessions were authorized to appoint firemen to fight fires in any place having forty houses within a half square mile. These powers were later expanded to include police, roads and street lighting. By 1830 Hamilton's economy was booming and the citizens began to demand more control over their own local affairs rather than leave them to the jurisdiction of the district magistrates who did not always have the best interests of Hamilton in mind. The court was unrepresentative and the special urban problems of sanitation, relief, streets, markets and education had been ignored for too long. The need for reform was urgent.

After a long struggle an elected Board of Police (meaning, power to regulate) was established in Brockville in 1832, and when Hamilton applied for its own board the following year the government could not turn it down.

The Board of Police Act divided Hamilton into four wards, each of which elected one member to the board. These elected members then appointed a fifth to join them. The board was generally clothed with the powers that the magistrates had previously exercised, and was authorized to appoint local officers, levy tax assessments, administer the law and punish offenders, and to pass by-laws for the good government of the town. By placing the town's officials under the authority of the people, The Board of Police Act initiated the beginning of the modern system of municipal government. In Hamilton, the board continued to run the town until it became an incorporated city in 1846.

The only important function of the town that was left to the Quarter Sessions was the location of Hamilton's marketplace. Grocery stores and butcher shops clustered into two markets near the centre of town. This concentration did not happen accidentally. It was promoted deliberately by the merchants since the centralization of shops acted as a magnet drawing the population to the centre of the small community. The markets kept the streets full of people, carts, noise and dirty, but alive and vibrant. At Christmas and other festivals, the farmers from the countryside arrived in wagons with their families to sell their produce and to buy needed manufactured goods. On

such days the centre of the city was an almost impenetrable jumble of horses, carts and people.

During this same time period the other urban areas in the District of Gore all achieved greater control over their own destinies. Dundas, which was the dominant commercial centre in the 1820's because of its greater water power, was granted the authority to hold its own town meetings separate from the township meetings in 1835. Twelve years later, it was incorporated with a hybrid of town council and president. In the 1840's such villages as Waterdown and Stoney Creek came into existence as separate entities empowered to build lockups and to elect councillors for local purposes.

As Hamilton reaped the advantages of her strategic maritime location at the head of the lake, the town's corporate power was gradually extended in the 1840's until it was incorporated as a city in 1846 with a mayor appointed by the elected councillors. In the succeeding years, the difficulty in appointing a mayor who was acceptable to all the aldermen led to the election of the mayor in 1856. This was a period of immense civic pride. Gas lamps illuminated the streets. The Great Western Railway joined the city to an expanded hinterland. The Mechanics Institute, the Mercantile Library Association, the circus and the Horticultural Society provided entertainment. Magnificent mansions such as Dundurn Castle, and the temporary residence of the Prince of Wales on the "mountain" all contributed to the city's pride in itself and its sense of destiny. The people, nevertheless, must have taken a different view of the city's muddy and unpaved streets,

of pigs running loose in the city, and of the crowded soup kitchens or the poor and destitute in the immigrant sheds by the bay.

The Achievement of Local Self-government

Fanned by the strong democratic breezes emanating from the south in the 1830's, the rural townships in the District of Gore were fertile soil for William Lyon Mackenzie's demand for a popularly elected magistracy. Unfortunately, the ill-planned rebellion of 1837 spelled the doom of the advances the reformers had been able to achieve in galvanizing the moribund town meetings into life in 1835.

The ultimate result of the rebellion, however, was that Lord Durham, who had been appointed by the British Government to remedy the political situation, recommended the establishment of strong municipal institutions based on the principle of local self-government. Although Durham's suggestion was not included in the Union bill which amalgamated Upper and Lower Canada into the Province of Canada in 1841, the new Governor, Lord Sydenham, pushed a modification of his recommendation to reform local government through the House in the same year in the form of The District Councils Act.

That was especially welcomed in Gore because it meant that the unpopular Quarter Sessions would be abolished, and because the population had grown so rapidly that the magistrates were unable to keep up with the increased amount of business. A petition from Brantford, for example, asked that the town be

separated from Gore since the pressure on the district court was so great that upwards of forty civil suits had been left untried for want of time at the last assizes. Sydenham, himself, was in favour of the bill because he wanted a comprehensive pattern of municipal institutions which would provide Canadians with valuable political training, and because it would take petty issues and local logrolling out of provincial affairs.

The District Councils Act provided for the transference of much of the power of the Quarter Sessions to elected councils in each of the province's districts. The freeholders in each township of Gore were entitled to elect one councillor to the District Council. The elected members held office for three years with one-third retiring annually. As a corporate body, the Council was able to sue, hold property and enter into contracts. It was also empowered to levy taxes for local purposes, oversee schools and charitable institutions, and to administer the functions of justice. Although the new bill introduced a significant measure of elective local government in Gore, Sydenham was able to limit popular power by placing the Council largely under the supervising control of officials appointed by the central government. The warden, treasurer and the district clerk were all appointed by the Governor, who had the power to dissolve the Council and to disallow any by-law within thirty days of its enactment.

The District Council Bill was attacked from both sides of the political spectrum. The Tories felt it was a dangerous move towards republicanism and democracy, while the Reformers said

it was not liberal enough. Others disliked the bill because it deprived the Assembly of its jobbing power. In addition to their ideological reservations, the reform leaders, who were also middle class landowners, felt threatened by the added tax imposed on uncultivated land. The act had finally passed with a small majority because the moderates were willing to put up with a bad bill rather than no bill at all.

Although the election of district councillors by the citizens of each municipality ensured better representation for the townships in the district town, the District of Gore (despite its subdivision in 1842) was still too large and the district seat too remote from the outlying regions for their affairs to be properly managed. The elected members received no remuneration for their job which required them to remain in Hamilton for five days four times a year. Despite several amendments to the act which provided for the election of the warden, treasurer and clerk, and the reduction of the number of sessions per year, the Council still had too much to do. All local concerns such as those relating to road construction, statute labour, assessments, and relief had to be passed by the twenty-six councillors in Hamilton. In effect it was a four-tier government of county, township, district and city.

The new act did, however, provide a useful bridge between the rudimentary local government of the pre-Union period, and the more advanced Municipal Corporations Act of 1849. While it lasted but eight years, the Council was a formative and experimental period in the history of local government in Wentworth County.

The Municipal Corporations Act was the culmination of a long struggle for "home rule" at all levels of local government and, with a few changes, it continued to constitute the basis of local government in Ontario until the end of the Second World War. The Act did away with the old partly-appointed, partly-elected district council and set up a completely integrated system of elected self-governing bodies. The old four-tier system was replaced by a two-tier system in the rural areas and a one-tier system in Hamilton. The last vestiges of central administrative control were removed and wide powers were given to the township council, which became the fundamental unit for local government. For the first time the urban areas were placed on the same level as the townships, all of which were subordinate to the county whose council constituted the reeves and deputy reeves from each municipal area. The county, which previously had little importance in local government, now replaced the district and formed the second tier of government. The City of Hamilton was not included in this two-tier system, and exercised the same powers which in the rural areas were divided between the county and the constituent units.

The principle behind the act was undoubtedly that of responsible government, but it was also the result of the middle classes struggle for political power in Ontario. The Municipal Corporations Act was a weapon in this battle. The abolition of the district system reduced the power of the magistracy which had been the perpetual powerbase of the Tories. The 1849 bill combined with The Assessment Act and The School Act to end the power of old Toryism. It should also be remembered that full

popular democracy was not instituted at this time. Government was still run by and for those fortunate enough to own property and be born to the "right" parents.

The Basics of Local Government:
Roads, Railways and Welfare

The major concern of the ratepayers in Wentworth County was transportation and communications. Until the 1830's this meant roads and plank highways; thereafter, attention was turned to canal construction, and finally to railway building in the 1850's.

In 1793 the magistrates were placed in charge of highways. They divided each district into sections and assigned overseers, who had been elected at the township meetings, to each area. The overseers then summoned those required by law to work on roads and superintended construction. The first stage in roadmaking was to blaze a trail through the woods, and to clear the trees and stumps out of the way. The next stage was the corduroy road for which logs were laid length-wise across the road to provide a sound, but bumpy foundation. These roads were later replaced by sand and gravel surfaces and then by plank highways.

The decision as to where the road was to be built rested with the Court of Quarter Sessions. The first road in Wentworth skirted Lake Ontario to Ancaster where it connected with the road to Niagara. This "lake shore road" as it was called was paralleled by Simcoe's Dundas Street which joined Dundas to London in 1793, and was later continued as far as Toronto.

Dundas Street was constructed quickly because Simcoe felt it was a military necessity. Local roads were slower to develop. The problem was money and labour. The local rate of assessment was restricted by law to no more than a penny to the pound, while the wholesale evasion of taxation by absentee landlords reduced the proceeds and threw the burden almost entirely upon the resident settlers of Wentworth. In addition, the first proceeds had to go towards the jail and court house, the expenses incurred in the administration of justice, and all the incidental expenses of local government administration. There was thus so little money left for local improvements that, beginning in the 1830's, the district had to resort to funding from the central government for sufficient monies for roads and bridges.

Before that however, in spite of these difficulties and high costs, several municipalities in Gore decided to combine their resources to get needed roads completed. The Dundas and Guelph Turnpike Company, for example, was organized by the commercial interests in the valley in 1827 and was loosely controlled by the municipal authorities. Two years later the Waterloo Road was financed by the freeholders in Waterloo, Beverly, West Flamborough and Dundas. A little later the District Councils of Gore and Wellington took out shares in the Guelph-Dundas Road. These roads were of particular importance to Dundas, Ancaster and Hamilton because they viewed them as the means to increase the size of their own rural hinterlands. The Hamilton-Port Dover plank road, for example, opened up Lake Erie and the Grand River region to Hamilton, while the Hamilton-Toronto plank road (1845) expanded

Hamilton's influence to the east. The expanding network of roads also helped to increase the sense of community in Wentworth County. In 1849 the care of roads was taken from the District Council and returned to the townships, or as in the case of the Hamilton-Brantford Road, were sold to private turnpike companies which maintained the highway and charged a toll for its use.

The great engine of modernization and prosperity for Hamilton was the railroad. Combined with the growth of steampower, the railway vaulted the city ahead of the older mill towns of Dundas and Ancaster. The swift river was replaced by the railway engine. The most important rail line in Wentworth was the Great Western that linked Hamilton with London, Windsor, Toronto and Buffalo. In 1849 its promoters, which included the mayor, the Board of Trade and Sir Allan MacNab, successfully persuaded the city government to purchase fifty thousand pounds of Great Western stock. For the next decade the city merchants backed almost every railroad venture that promised to help them tap the resources of the hinterland. The City Council took out stock in the Galt and Guelph Railroad (1853) and the Hamilton-Port Dover Railroad (1855). The latter was promoted by MacNab and the mayor of Hamilton, who promised that the line would secure the Lake Erie and Buffalo trade. In the 1870's increased total traffic was facilitated by railways to Dundas and Georgetown, which not only aided the Hamilton merchants and the rural farmers, but allowed the townships to enjoy the commercial and cultural advantages of the larger city.

As the hub of the vast railway network throughout Southern Ontario, Hamilton soon became the marketing, commercial and service centre for the region. The city's population quadrupled between 1846 and 1859 and the Council continued to be successful in attracting such business enterprises to the city as the Gurney Iron Foundry, Wanzer's Sewing Machine Firm, and Sawyer's Agricultural Implements. This success was repeated in the 1880's when Hamilton's generous tax rebates, subsidies, and offers of free land lured more American manufacturing industries to the city than to any other urban area in the country. Other assets included an inexpensive supply of power from the Cataract Power Company at Niagara (1895), and the construction of four radial streetcar lines into the hinterland.

By the end of the century, the city was among the leading industrial centres of the Dominion. The following tribute penned by a travelling party of Englishmen in 1889 reflected the city's tremendous economic growth:

"Of all the places we had visited during our trip to the American Continent, the prettiest, cleanest, healthiest, and best conducted was the City of Hamilton, Canada; and from our inspection of the vast and varied manufacturing industries, its one hundred and seventy factories, with its 14,000 artisans, the large capital invested, and the immense output annually, we concluded it was well named the Birmingham of Canada and has undoubtedly a great and glorious future before it."

The electric streetcar era of the 1900's was merely an extension of the railway craze of the 1850's. Four electric lines carried farm produce, passengers and freight between Hamilton, Dundas, Ancaster, Stoney Creek, Burlington, Brantford, Oakville and Grimsby. All four lines were owned by Dominion Power (1907) which also provided electric power to the region. The Hamilton-Grimsby-Beamsville line (1896) served the fruit and cannery businesses in the area and contributed to the development of a profitable milk industry. The City Council thought the streetcar route would be important for the area and it gave the line twenty-five thousand dollars to get underway. By the 1920's this feeling had spread to Ancaster, Dundas and the other municipalities along the routes. Thus, when Ontario Hydro (which had taken over control of the radial lines in the 1920's) announced its plans to abandon the streetcar routes, the Province was forced to extend its service several times because of the protest and complaints from the communities along the line. During the depression the electric streetcars were replaced by bus service.

While the area's finances and efforts were directed towards improving its commercial prospects, social services suffered from inadequate direction and funding. Although Gore was required by law to establish a court house and a jail it was not built until 1827, eleven years after Gore became a District. The jails served as a catch-all for the community's problems. They acted as a poorhouse, an asylum, a house of detention and a place of correction. None was done very well, and by the 1830's Hamilton's jail was reported to be in a very dilapidated condition.

Only limited assistance was given to the needy. The magistrates apprenticed orphan children and granted funds to the destitute ill, but did little else for the poor whom society condemned as lazy, thriftless and immoral.

In 1840 the operation of the jails was given to the District Council and eight years later to the County Council. Hamilton had separate control over its own social services. Welfare programs continued to be given low priority and Hamilton was reluctant to even implement the provincial legislation concerning houses of refuge, inspection of infant boarding homes, and the creation of local health boards. To the despair of the provincial inspectors, even mandatory legislation was frequently evaded if it would save money. Limited finances forced the county and the city to construct one jail for both authorities. Its upkeep, however, was a constant source of conflict as neither party could agree on the division of costs. In both 1870 and 1913 the disagreement became so heated that the county threatened to construct its own court house and jail.

The Decline of Local Government

The Municipal Corporations Act did not solve all the problems in Hamilton-Wentworth. The County Council, which was composed of reeves and deupty reeves from each municipality in Gore gradually became so unwieldy that it was difficult to transact business efficiently. To help matters, the southwest townships in Gore were combined in 1851 to form the separate county of Brant, and the municipality was called the United Counties of Wentworth, Halton and Brant. Brant separated completely from

Gore at the end of the year and in 1854 Wentworth assumed its final form when Halton went its own way.

Another problem that remained unresolved was that the representation of the smaller municipalities in Wentworth was not in proportion to their population or their contribution to county taxation. A reform in 1896 tried to deal with this problem by having county councillors elected separately from township councillors and basing these new electoral districts on population, assessment and acreage. The idea was good in theory, but in actual practice the separation of the county council from the municipal councils lessened the importance of the reeves, and many of the smaller townships were left without a resident representative. As a result the original county council system was restored in 1907. The number of members was reduced by providing that each reeve should represent 1,000 voters. In a similar pattern, the method of appointment to the local municipal councils was altered back and forth in the last half of the nineteenth century. By 1900, however, all mayors, reeves and deputy reeves in Wentworth were elected to their positions.

In Hamilton, the city was caught up in the urban reform movement that swept through North America at the end of the century. Concerned with bolstering the prestige and industrial prospects of the city, the citizens sought for and obtained public control over electric power (1911) and water. The environment was improved through public health codes, parks, and the construction of stately and impressive municipal buildings. To foster civic improvements and to handle rapacious utility companies the

city enlarged the powers of the executive by creating a Board of Control (1909) whose duties included preparing estimates, awarding contracts, and inspecting all municipal works. Although this appeared to be a devolution of authority, it was, in fact, a centralization of authority in the hands of a board which at that time was comprised of technically trained experts who were independent of the electorate.

The rapid growth of population, industrialization, and urbanization at the turn of the century greatly increased the financial burdens of local governments and restricted their ability to provide needed social services. Education and protection absorbed two-thirds of expenditures, which left few funds to deal with the vast array of new responsibilities. Municipal government organization had not kept pace with economic changes! The inability of local government to handle these problems led to the devolution of authority to specially commissioned boards, and then to the transfer of financing and administration to the provincial government. This trend gradually eroded the municipal councils' independence, and their powers became more restricted and circumscribed.

The devolution of township functions to single purpose bodies began in the 1880's with the creation of public library boards (1882), park boards (1883) and boards of health (1884). The problem was that these newly created bodies were largely independent of the municipal councils, while at the same time the councils were responsible for the boards' financial obligations. In effect, this served to further restrict the municipalities' independence. In subsequent years local government was made

financially responsible for a growing list of services over which they had little control. This was especially true for such services as neglected children (1893), juvenile courts (1910) sanitary inspectors (1911), suburban roads (1915), and relief (1935). Independence was further reduced by restricting the councils' control over its own municipal officials. The medical officer of health, for example, could not be removed (1927) except with the consent of the Minister of Health, while the sanitary inspector's appointment was subject to the approval of the Minister of Health (1938). The provincial government even specified the working hours for Hamilton's fire department (1927).

Accompanying this imposition of obligatory expenditures was the elimination of some of Hamilton's sources of revenue. The municipality's right to charge a license fee for motor vehicles was taken over by the Province in 1931, and five years later its legal right to collect income tax was abolished and the municipality was, in part, compensated by a provincial subsidy.

The natural result of these changes was the growing inability of the municipalities to finance the vast array of expanding services that had been delegated to them by the provincial government. This failure forced the central government to widen its own field of operations and to extend its control over the municipalities themselves. This process began in 1882 when the Bureau of Industries was created to collect municipal statistics. Fifteen years later, after several cases of municipal auditing errors and defalcations, the office of the Provincial Municipal Auditor was established to supervise the municipalities account books and their system of bookkeeping. The Ontario Railway

and Municipal Board was set up in 1906 to provide expert supervision of local public utilities. Similar to the Local Government Board in Britain, it supervised the location and installation of railways, streetcar lines, telephone systems and other public utilities, and approved rates and municipal debentures. Four years later the Province's supervision over statistics, audits, and public utilities was centralized in the Bureau of Municipal Affairs which coordinated its actions with the Railway and Municipal Board.

The large number of municipalities that defaulted during the Great Depression called for prompt and direct action, and in 1932 the Ontario Municipal Board was formed out of the Bureau of Municipal Affairs and the Railway Board. The OMB was given authority over all capital expenditures and permanent improvements made by the local councils. Three years later the Department of Municipal Affairs was created to effect improvement in the conduct and administration of municipal affairs, and was given final responsibility for administering all government legislation that affected municipal institutions.

The eventual result of these developments was a reduction of the independence of local government in Hamilton-Wentworth. Increasing centralization was slowly leading to apoplexy at the centre and paralysis at the extremities. At the same time the government began to realize that a vibrant local government was essential for the preservation of democracy, for it is at the local level that democracy is direct, personal and readily understood. The only solutions appeared to be either to curtail

or check the growth of social services or to make municipalities into more viable financial units. When the latter choice was made the next step was reorganization of local government.

By the close of the 19th Century, Hamilton and Wentworth County began to appreciate more clearly the advantages of municipal cooperation. In 1891, for example, West Flamborough and other interested townships in the area purchased the old Dundas-Waterloo Turnpike and converted it into a free road. A decade later the County was given the authority to designate county roads, and by 1904, Wentworth had established a uniform system of free roads. Unfortunately, these macadamized roads could not bear the heavy and sustained traffic load of the expanding population, and asphalt or concrete-surfaced highways were too costly for the rural communities. The ultimate result was the creation of the Hamilton-Wentworth Suburban Roads Commission (1918) in which the City had to contribute for roads in its immediate area. The first improvements were made along portions of King Street, Main Street, Barton Street, and Beach Road. The commissioners were appointed in equal numbers by the County and City, and the costs were paid by Wentworth, Hamilton and the Province in the proportions of 30 per cent, 30 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. These percentages were subsequently altered (1925) to 25 per cent, 25 per cent and 50 per cent.

In the area of pollution control and beautification, the City and County worked together in both official and unofficial levels. The Hamilton Board of Parks Management, which was established in 1900, designed Chedoke Winter Sports Park,

King's Forest and Confederation Park. Environmental groups were responsible for the preservation of the Escarpment in its natural state (1913) from Chedoke Falls to Albion Ravine, and the Royal Botanical Gardens (1930) was developed out of an unsightly stone quarry. In 1941, a separate board was created to:

"establish and maintain upon its property (which included the Rock Gardens, the parkland on Burlington Heights, the shores of Coote's Paradise and extensive tracts skirting the campus of McMaster University) parks, museums, zoological or other gardens, natural history collections, observatories, art galleries, monuments, and works of art...; receive, acquire and hold such lands in the City of Hamilton and in the Townships of Ancaster, Beverly, Barton, West Flamboro, East Flamboro and Saltfleet, as it may consider advisable in the development of the Royal Botanical Gardens."

More recently the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority has been active in the Spencer Creek watershed and in developing a regional environmental plan for the harbour, the Escarpment, Cootes Paradise and Dundas Valley.

Other areas of County/City cooperation include the operation of County health units and the Wentworth Library Co-operative. The library co-operative was formed in 1947 to purchase and distribute books and to stimulate library development throughout the rural townships. A short while later, a book van was added to facilitate book distribution in the outlying districts. Further signs of the citizens' willingness to cooperate for the

general good were manifested in the establishment of the Hamilton-Wentworth Planning Board; the financial aid given to Wentworth County by the City to enable the County to rebuild and modernize its own court house (1955); and by such unofficial actions as the City and County clerks' decision to submit joint advertisements to the local newspapers.

In the post-war years it became increasingly evident that local government structures in Wentworth no longer corresponded to the realities of community life. The old concept that rural areas must be separate from urban places had to be re-evaluated. With little other than agricultural land as the basis for raising revenue, the rural townships were particularly hard hit by the decline in agriculture; while at the same time such monies had to be spread over a much greater variety of responsibilities. What was needed was a consolidation of the financial resources of Hamilton-Wentworth to improve its effectiveness in dealing with urgent urban problems; and a restructuring of the local government system to promote greater efficiency in social and economic planning.

The whole notion of a general comprehensive regional planning strategy for Ontario had been advocated for many years by the experts in the field and by such bodies as the Conservation Council of Ontario. Early legislation dealing with housing and urban planning (1918) was swept away in the Depression. Other attempts during the 1930's met with resistance and municipal abuse. The Second World War, however, revealed some of the advantages of regional planning and resulted in the creation of

"provincial service regions" (1955-65), which enabled the government to deal with sub-provincial matters on a larger scale than municipal entities, and in the establishment of the Conservation Authorities to provide large-scale regional planning. In subsequent years the Economic Atlas of Ontario (1969), the Niagara Escarpment Commission, and the Parkway Belt Legislation for the golden triangle from Hamilton to Oshawa, all showed the advantages of regional planning. Finally in 1974, regional government based on the Metropolitan Toronto model, was established in the Hamilton-Wentworth district.

Conclusion

It must be remembered that yesterday's innovations are today's constraints. Government structures change constantly with the changing needs and problems of the community. Initially the different municipalities in Hamilton-Wentworth could not decide whether to remain independent of each other or to cooperate with the other townships in areas of joint interest. As the region developed and Hamilton became the undisputed metropolis for the area, the rural townships became more integrated with the dominant city. In subsequent years the various municipalities in Wentworth cooperated in the establishment of jails and in the construction of roads, railways and streetcar lines. Better transportation facilitated increased movement between city and country. Hamilton merchants looked to the townships for farm produce, while farmers came to Hamilton for its cultural and recreational facilities. Unfortunately, local political rivalry and economic constraints frequently prevented the county from carrying out needed regional planning and social services and from servicing the community in the best possible way.

History reveals why and how present day institutions developed. In each case they evolved to meet a particular and unique situation. As these situations change, the institutions must change with them. The new needs of the second half of the twentieth century require a strong form of local government. Fortunately, the citizens of Hamilton-Wentworth have many examples of cooperation that they can rely on to make local government work for the entire area.

* The material for this section was taken from: George A. Nader, Cities of Canada Volume 2 (Toronto, 1976), and Michael B. Katz, The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City (Cambridge, 1975).

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